MUNSEY

MAY 20 1922

A MAGAZINE RICH IN
ENGROSSING FICTION

BEGINS IN THIS ISSUE

THE GIRL FROM HOLLYWOOD

BY
EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS
AUTHOR OF "TARZAN"

FOUR OTHER SERIALS
TEN SHORT STORIES

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JUNE

PRICE 25 CENTS

MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE

JUNE, 1922

Vol. LXXVI NUMBER 1

The Girl from Hollywood*

A MODERN DRAMA OF CITY AND COUNTRY LIFE IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

By Edgar Rice Burroughs

Author of "Tarzan of the Apes," "A Princess of Mars," etc.

THE two horses picked their way carefully downward over the loose shale of the steep hillside. The big bay stallion in the lead sidled mincingly, tossing his head nervously, and flecking the flannel shirt of his rider with foam. Behind the man on the man horse a girl rode a clean-limbed bay of lighter color, whose method of descent, while less showy, was safer, for he came more slowly, and in the very bad places he braced his four feet forward and slid down, sometimes almost sitting upon the ground.

At the base of the hill there was a narrow level strip; then an eight-foot wash, with steep banks, barred the way to the opposite side of the cañon, which rose gently to the hills beyond. At the foot of the descent the man reined in and waited until the girl was safely down; then he wheeled his mount and trotted toward the wash. Twenty feet from it he gave the animal its head and a word. The horse broke into a gallop, took off at the edge of the wash, and cleared it so effortlessly as almost to give the impression of flying.

Behind the man came the girl, but her horse came at the wash with a rush—not the slow, steady gallop of the stallion—and at the very brink he stopped to gather himself. The dry bank caved beneath his front feet, and into the wash he went, head first.

The man turned and spurred back. The girl looked up from her saddle, making a wry face.

"No damage?" he asked, an expression of concern upon his face.

"No damage," the girl replied. "Senator is clumsy enough at jumping, but no

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matter what happens he always lights on his feet."

"Ride down a bit," said the man. "There's an easy way out just below."

She moved off in the direction he indicated, her horse picking his way among the loose bowlders in the wash bottom.

"Mother says he's part cat," she remarked. "I wish he could jump like the Apache!"

The man stroked the glossy neck of his own mount.

"He never will," he said. "He's afraid. The Apache is absolutely fearless; he'd go anywhere I'd ride him. He's been mired with me twice, but he never refuses a wet spot; and that's the test, I say, of a horse's courage."

They had reached a place where the bank was broken down, and the girl's horse scrambled from the wash.

"Maybe he's like his rider," suggested the girl, looking at the Apache; "brave, but reckless."

"It was worse than reckless," said the man. "It was asinine. I shouldn't have led you over the jump when I know how badly Senator jumps."

"And you wouldn't have, Custer"—she hesitated—"if—"

"If I hadn't been drinking," he finished for her. "I know what you were going to say, Grace; but I think you're wrong. I never drink enough to show it. No one ever saw me that way—not so that it was noticeable."

"It is always noticeable to me and to your mother," she corrected him gently. "We always know it, Custer. It shows in little things like what you did just now. Oh, it isn't anything, I know, dear; but we who love you wish you didn't do it quite so often."

"It's funny," he said, "but I never cared for it until it became a risky thing to get it. Oh, well, what's the use? I'll quit it if you say so. It hasn't any hold on me."

Involuntarily he squared his shoulders—an unconscious tribute to the strength of his weakness.

Together, their stirrups touching, they rode slowly down the cañon trail toward the ranch. Often they rode thus, in the restful silence that is a birthright of comradeship. Neither spoke until after they had reined in their sweating horses beneath the cool shade of the spreading sycamore that guards the junction of El Camino Largo and the main trail that winds up Sycamore Cañon.

It was the first hot day of early spring. The rains were over. The California hills were green and purple and gold. The new leaves lay softly fresh on the gaunt boughs of yesterday. A blue jay scolded from a clump of sumac across the trail.

The girl pointed up into the cloudless sky, where several great birds circled majestically, rising and falling upon motionless wings.

"The vultures are back," she said. "I am always glad to see them come again."

"Yes," said the man. "They are bully scavengers, and we don't have to pay 'em wages."

The girl smiled up at him.

"I'm afraid my thoughts were more poetic than practical," she said. "I was only thinking that the sky looked less lonely now that they have come. Why suggest their diet?"

"I know what you mean," he said. "I like them, too. Maligned as they are, they are really wonderful birds, and sort of mysterious. Did you ever stop to think that you never see a very young one or a dead one? Where do they die? Where do they grow to maturity? I wonder what they've found up there! Let's ride up. Martin said he saw a new calf up beyond Jackknife Cañon yesterday. That would be just about under where they're circling now."

They guided their horses around a large, flat slab of rock that some camper had contrived into a table beneath the sycamore, and started across the trail toward the opposite side of the cañon. They were in the middle of the trail when the man drew in and listened.

"Some one is coming," he said. "Let's wait and see who it is. I haven't sent any one back into the hills to-day."

"I have an idea," remarked the girl, "that there is more going on up there"—she nodded toward the mountains stretching to the south of them—"than you know about."

"How is that?" he asked.

"So often recently we have heard horsemen passing the ranch late at night. If they weren't going to stop at your place, those who rode up the trail must have been headed into the high hills; but I'm sure that those whom we heard coming down

weren't coming from the Rancho del Ganado."

"No," he said, "not late at night—or not often, at any rate."

The footsteps of a cantering horse drew rapidly closer, and presently the animal and its rider came into view around a turn in the trail.

"It's only Allen," said the girl.

The newcomer reined in at sight of the man and the girl. He was evidently surprised, and the girl thought that he seemed ill at ease.

"Just givin' Baldy a work-out," he explained. "He ain't been out for three or four days, an' you told me to work 'em out if I had time."

Custer Pennington nodded.

"See any stock back there?"

"No. How's the Apache to-day—forgin' as bad as usual?"

Pennington shook his head negatively.

"That fellow shod him yesterday just the way I want him shod. I wish you'd take a good look at his shoes, Slick, so you can see that he's always shod this same way." His eyes had been traveling over Slick's mount, whose heaving sides were covered with lather. "Baldy's pretty soft, Slick; I wouldn't work him too hard all at once. Get him up to it gradually."

He turned and rode off with the girl at his side. Slick Allen looked after them for a moment, and then moved his horse off at a slow walk toward the ranch. He was a lean, sinewy man, of medium height. He might have been a cavalryman once. He sat his horse, even at a walk, like one who has sweated and bled under a drill sergeant in the days of his youth.

"How do you like him?" the girl asked of Pennington.

"He's a good horseman, and good horsemen are getting rare these days," replied Pennington; "but I don't know that I'd choose him for a playmate. Don't you like him?"

"I'm afraid I don't. His eyes give me the creeps—they're like a fish's."

"To tell the truth, Grace, I don't like him," said Custer. "He's one of those rare birds—a good horseman who doesn't love horses. I imagine he won't last long on the Rancho del Ganado; but we've got to give him a fair shake—he's only been with us a few weeks."

They were picking their way toward the summit of a steep hogback. The man, who led, was seeking carefully for the safest footing, shamed out of his recent recklessness by the thought of how close the girl had come to a serious accident through his thoughtlessness. They rode along the hogback until they could look down into a tiny basin where a small bunch of cattle was grazing, and then, turning and dipping over the edge, they dropped slowly toward the animals.

Near the bottom of the slope they came upon a white-faced bull standing beneath the spreading shade of a live oak. He turned his woolly face toward them, his red-rimmed eyes observing them dispassionately for a moment. Then he turned away again and resumed his cud, disdaining further notice of them.

"That's the King of Ganado, isn't it?" asked the girl.

"Looks like him, doesn't he? But he isn't. He's the King's likeliest son, and unless I'm mistaken he's going to give the old fellow a mighty tough time of it this fall, if the old boy wants to hang on to the grand championship. We've never shown him yet. It's an idea of father's. He's always wanted to spring a new champion at a great show and surprise the world. He's kept this fellow hidden away ever since he gave the first indication that he was going to be a fine bull. At least a hundred breeders have visited the herd in the past year, and not one of them has seen him. Father says he's the greatest bull that ever lived, and that his first show is going to be the International."

"I just know he'll win," exclaimed the girl. "Why, look at him! Isn't he a beauty?"

"Got a back like a billiard table," commented Custer proudly.

They rode down then among the heifers. There were a dozen beauties—three-year-olds. Hidden to one side, behind a small bush, the man's quick eyes discerned a little bundle of red and white.

"There it is, Grace," he called, and the two rode toward it.

One of the heifers looked fearfully toward them, then at the bush, and finally walked toward it, lowing plaintively.

"We're not going to hurt it, little girl," the man assured her.

As they came closer, there arose a thing of long, wabbly legs, big joints, and great, dark eyes, its spotless coat of red and white shining with health and life.

"The cunning thing!" cried the girl. "How I'd like to squeeze it! I just love 'em, Custer!"

She had slipped from her saddle, and, dropping her reins on the ground, was approaching the calf.

"Look out for the cow!" cried the man, as he dismounted and moved forward to the girl's side, with his arm through the Apache's reins. "She hasn't been up much, and she may be a little wild."

The calf stood its ground for a moment, and then, with tail erect, cavorted madly for its mother, behind whom it took refuge.

"I just love 'em! I just love 'em!" repeated the girl.

"You say the same thing about the colts and the little pigs," the man reminded her.

"I love 'em all!" she cried, shaking her head, her eyes twinkling.

"You love them because they're little and helpless, just like babies," he said. "Oh, Grace, how you'd love a baby!"

The girl flushed prettily. Quite suddenly he seized her in his arms and crushed her to him, smothering her with a long kiss. Breathless, she wriggled partially away, but he still held her in his arms.

"Why won't you, Grace?" he begged. "There'll never be anybody else for me or for you. Father and mother and Eva love you almost as much as I do, and on your side your mother and Guy have always seemed to take it as a matter of course that we'd marry. It isn't the drinking, is it, dear?"

"No, it's not that, Custer. Of course I'll marry you—some day; but not yet. Why, I haven't lived yet, Custer! I want to live. I want to do something outside of the humdrum life that I have always led and the humdrum life that I shall live as a wife and mother. I want to live a little, Custer, and then I'll be ready to settle down. You all tell me that I am beautiful, and down, away down in the depth of my soul, I feel that I have talent. If I have, I ought to use the gifts God has given me."

She was speaking very seriously, and the man listened patiently and with respect, for he realized that she was revealing for the first time a secret yearning that she must have long held locked in her bosom.

"Just what do you want to do, dear?" he asked gently.

"I—oh, it seems silly when I try to put it in words, but in dreams it is very beautiful and very real."

"The stage?" he asked.

"It is just like you to understand!" Her smile rewarded him. "Will you help me? I know mother will object."

"You want me to help you take all the happiness out of my life?" he asked.

"It would only be for a little while—just a few years, and then I would come back to you—after I had made good."

"You would never come back, Grace, unless you failed," he said. "If you succeeded, you would never be contented in any other life or atmosphere. If you came back a failure, you couldn't help but carry a little bitterness always in your heart. It would never be the same dear, care-free heart that went away so gayly. Here you have a real part to play in a real drama—not make-believe upon a narrow stage with painted drops." He flung out a hand in broad gesture. "Look at the setting that God has painted here for us to play our parts in—the parts that He has chosen for us! Your mother played upon the same stage, and mine. Do you think them failures? And both were beautiful girls—as beautiful as you."

"Oh, but you don't understand, after all, Custer!" she cried. "I thought you did."

"I do understand that for your sake I must do my best to persuade you that you have as full a life before you here as upon the stage. I am fighting first for your happiness, Grace, and then for mine. If I fail, then I shall do all that I can to help you realize your ambition. If you cannot stay because you are convinced that you will be happier here, then I do not want you to stay."

"Kiss me," she demanded suddenly. "I am only thinking of it, anyway, so let's not worry until there is something to worry about."

II

THE man bent his lips to hers again, and her arms stole about his neck. The calf, in the meantime, perhaps disgusted by such absurdities, had scampered off to try his brand-new legs again, with the result that he ran into a low bush, turned a somersault, and landed on his back. The mother, still doubtful of the intentions of the newcomers, to whose malevolent presence she may have attributed the accident, voiced a perturbed low; whereupon there broke from the vicinity of the live oak a

deep note, not unlike the rumbling of distant thunder.

The man looked up.

" I think we'll be going," he said. " The Emperor has issued an ultimatum."

" Or a bull, perhaps," Grace suggested, as they walked quickly toward her horse.

" Awful!" he commented, as he assisted her into the saddle.

Then he swung to his own.

The Emperor moved majestically toward them, his nose close to the ground. Occasionally he stopped, pawing the earth and throwing dust upon his broad back.

" Doesn't he look wicked?" cried the girl. " Just look at those eyes?"

" He's just an old bluffer," replied the man. " However, I'd rather have you in the saddle, for you can't always be sure just what they'll do. We must call his bluff, though; it would never do to run from him—might give him bad habits."

He rode toward the advancing animal, breaking into a canter as he drew near the bull, and striking his booted leg with a quirt.

" Hi, there, you old reprobate! Beat it!" he cried.

The bull stood his ground with lowered head and rumbled threats until the horseman was almost upon him; then he turned quickly aside as the rider went past.

" That's better," remarked Custer, as the girl joined him.

" You're not a bit afraid of him, are you, Custer? You're not afraid of anything."

" Oh, I wouldn't say that," he demurred. " I learned a long time ago that most encounters consist principally of bluff. Maybe I've just grown to be a good bluffer. Anyhow, I'm a better bluffer than the Emperor. If the rascal had only known it, he could have run me ragged."

As they rode up the side of the basin, the man's eyes moved constantly from point to point, now noting the condition of the pasture grasses, or again searching the more distant hills. Presently they alighted upon a thin, wavering line of brown, which zigzagged down the opposite side of the basin from a clump of heavy brush that partially hid a small ravine, and crossed the meadow ahead of them.

" There's a new trail, Grace, and it don't belong there. Let's go and take a look at it."

They rode ahead until they reached the trail, at a point where it crossed the bottom of the basin and started up the side they had been ascending. The man leaned above his horse's shoulder and examined the trampled turf.

" Horses," he said. " I thought so, and it's been used a lot this winter. You can see even now where the animals slipped and floundered after the heavy rains."

" But you don't run horses in this pasture, do you?" asked the girl.

" No; and we haven't run anything in it since last summer. This is the only bunch in it, and they were just turned in about a week ago. Anyway, the horses that made this trail were mostly shod. Now what in the world is anybody going up there for?" His eyes wandered to the heavy brush into which the trail disappeared upon the opposite rim of the basin. " I'll have to follow that up to-morrow—it's too late to do it to-day."

" We can follow it the other way, toward the ranch," she suggested.

They found that the trail wound up the hillside and crossed the hogback in heavy brush, which, in many places, had been cut away to allow the easier passage of a horseman.

" Do you see," asked Custer, as they drew rein at the summit of the ridge, " that although the trail crosses here in plain sight of the ranch house, the brush would absolutely conceal a horseman from the view of any one at the house? It must run right down into Jackknife Cañon. Funny none of us have noticed it, for there's scarcely a week that that trail isn't ridden by some of us!"

As they descended into the cañon, they discovered why that end of the new trail had not been noticed. It ran deep and well marked through the heavy brush of a gully to a place where the brush commenced to thin, and there it branched into a dozen dim trails that joined and blended with the old, well worn cattle paths of the hillside.

" Somebody's mighty foxy," observed the man; " but I don't see what it's all about. The days of cattle runners and bandits are over."

" Just imagine!" exclaimed the girl. " A real mystery in our lazy, old hills!"

The man rode in silence and in thought. A herd of pure-bred Herefords, whose value would have ransomed half the crowned heads remaining in Europe, grazed in the several pastures that ran far back

into those hills; and back there somewhere that trail led, but for what purpose? No good purpose, he was sure, or it had not been so cleverly hidden.

As they came to the trail which they called the Camino Corto, where it commenced at the gate leading from the old goat corral, the man jerked his thumb toward the west along it.

"They must come and go this way," he said.

"Perhaps they're the ones mother and I have heard passing at night," suggested the girl. "If they are, they come right through your property, below the house—not this way."

He opened the gate from the saddle and they passed through, crossing the barranco, and stopping for a moment to look at the pigs and talk with the herdsman. Then they rode on toward the ranch house, a half mile farther down the widening cañon. It stood upon the summit of a low hill, the declining sun transforming its plastered walls, its cupolas, the sturdy arches of its arcades, into the semblance of a Moorish castle.

At the foot of the hill they dismounted at the saddle horse stable, tied their horses, and ascended the long flight of rough concrete steps toward the house. As they rounded the wild sumac bush at the summit, they were espied by those sitting in the patio, around three sides of which the house was built.

"Oh, here they are now!" exclaimed Mrs. Pennington. "We were so afraid that Grace would ride right on home, Custer. We had just persuaded Mrs. Evans to stay for dinner. Guy is coming, too."

"Mother, you here, too?" cried the girl. "How nice and cool it is in here! It would save a lot of trouble if we brought our things, mother."

"We are hoping that at least one of you will, very soon," said Colonel Pennington, who had risen, and now put an arm affectionately about the girl's shoulders.

"That's what I've been telling her again this afternoon," said Custer; "but instead she wants to—"

The girl turned toward him with a little frown and shake of her head.

"You'd better run down and tell Allen that we won't use the horses until after dinner," she said.

He grimaced good-naturedly and turned away.

"I'll have him take Senator home," he said. "I can drive you and your mother down in the car, when you leave."

As he descended the steps that wound among the umbrella trees, taking on their new foliage, he saw Allen examining the Apache's shoes. As he neared them, the horse pulled away from the man, his suddenly lowered hoof striking Allen's instep. With an oath the fellow stepped back and swung a vicious kick to the animal's belly. Almost simultaneously a hand fell heavily upon his shoulder. He was jerked roughly back, whirled about, and sent spinning a dozen feet away, where he stumbled and fell. As he scrambled to his feet, white with rage, he saw the younger Pennington before him.

"Go to the office and get your time," ordered Pennington.

"I'll get you first, you son of a—"

A hard fist connecting suddenly with his chin put a painful period to his sentence before it was completed, and stopped his mad rush.

"I'd be more careful of my conversation, Allen, if I were you," said Pennington quietly. "Just because you've been drinking is no excuse for *that*. Now go on up to the office, as I told you to."

He had caught the odor of whisky as he jerked the man past him.

"You goin' to can me for drinkin'—*you?*" demanded Allen.

"You know what I'm canning you for. You know that's the one thing that don't go on Ganado. You ought to get what you gave the Apache, and you'd better beat it before I lose my temper and give it to you!"

The man rose slowly to his feet. In his mind he was revolving his chances of successfully renewing his attack; but presently his judgment got the better of his desire and his rage. He moved off slowly up the hill toward the house. A few yards, and he turned.

"I ain't a goin' to ferget this, you—you—"

"Be careful!" Pennington admonished.

"Nor you ain't goin' to ferget it, neither, you fox-trottin' dude!"

Allen turned again to the ascent of the steps. Pennington walked to the Apache and stroked his muzzle.

"Old boy," he crooned, "there don't anybody kick you and get away with it does there?"

Halfway up, Allen stopped and turned again.

"You think you're the whole cheese, you Penningtons, don't you?" he called back. "With all your money an' your fine friends! Fine friends, yah! I can put one of 'em where he belongs any time I want—the darned bootlegger! That's what he is. You wait—you'll see!"

"A-ah, beat it!" sighed Pennington wearily.

Mounting the Apache, he led Grace's horse along the foot of the hill toward the smaller ranch house of their neighbor, some half mile away. Humming a little tune, he unsaddled Senator, turned him into his corral, saw that there was water in his trough, and emptied a measure of oats into his manger, for the horse had cooled off since the afternoon ride. As neither of the Evans ranch hands appeared, he found a piece of rag and wiped off the Senator's bit, turned the saddle blankets wet side up to dry, and then, leaving the stable, crossed the yard to mount the Apache.

A young man in riding clothes appeared simultaneously from the interior of the bungalow, which stood a hundred feet away. Crossing the wide porch, he called to Pennington.

"Hello there, Penn! What you doing?" he demanded.

"Just brought Senator in—Grace is up at the house. You're coming up there, too, Guy."

"Sure, but come in here a second. I've got something to show you."

Pennington crossed the yard and entered the house behind Grace's brother, who conducted him to his bedroom. Here young Evans unlocked a closet, and, after rummaging behind some clothing, emerged with a bottle, the shape and dimensions of which were once as familiar in the land of the free as the benign countenance of Lydia E. Pinkham.

"It's the genuine stuff, Penn, too!" he declared.

Pennington smiled.

"Thanks, old fellow, but I've quit," he said.

"Quit!" exclaimed Evans.

"Yep."

"But think of it, man—aged eight years in the wood, and bottled in bond before July 1, 1919. The real thing, and as cheap as moonshine—only six beans a quart. Can you believe it?"

"I cannot," admitted Pennington. "Your conversation listens phony."

"But it's the truth. You may have quit, but one little snifter of this won't hurt you. Here, this bottle's already open—just try it;" and he proffered the bottle and a glass to the other.

"Well, it's pretty hard to resist anything that sounds as good as this does," remarked Pennington. "I guess one won't hurt me any." He poured himself a drink and took it. "Wonderful!" he ejaculated.

"Here," said Evans, diving into the closet once more. "I got you a bottle, too, and we can get more."

Pennington took the bottle and examined it, almost caressingly.

"Eight years in the wood!" he murmured. "I've got to take it, Guy. Must have something to hand down to posterity." He drew a bill fold from his pocket and counted out six dollars.

"Thanks," said Guy. "You'll never regret it."

III

As the two young men climbed the hill to the big house, a few minutes later, they found the elder Pennington standing at the edge of the driveway that circled the hill top, looking out toward the wide cañon and the distant mountains. In the nearer foreground lay the stable and corrals of the saddle horses, the hen house with its two long alfalfa runways, and the small dairy barn accommodating the little herd of Guernseys that supplied milk, cream, and butter for the ranch. A quarter of a mile beyond, among the trees, was the red-roofed "cabin" where the unmarried ranch hands ate and slept, near the main corrals with their barns, outhouses, and sheds.

In a hilly pasture farther up the cañon the black and iron gray of Percheron brood mares contrasted with the greening hillsides of spring. Still farther away, the white and red of the lordly figure of the Emperor stood out boldly upon the summit of the ridge behind Jackknife Cañon.

The two young men joined the older, and Custer put an arm affectionately about his father's shoulders.

"You never tire of it," said the young man.

"I have been looking at it for twenty-two years, my son," replied the elder Pennington, "and each year it has become more wonderful to me. It never changes,

and yet it is never twice alike. See the purple sage away off there, and the lighter spaces of wild buckwheat, and here and there among the scrub oak the beautiful pale green of the manzanita — scintillant jewels in the diadem of the hills! And the faint haze of the mountains that seems to throw them just a little out of focus, to make them a perfect background for the beautiful hills which the Supreme Artist is placing on his canvas to-day. An hour from now He will paint another masterpiece, and to-night another, and forever others, with never two alike, nor ever one that mortal man can duplicate; and all for us, boy, all for us, if we have the hearts and the souls to see!"

"How you love it!" said the boy.

"Yes, and your mother loves it; and it is our great happiness that you and Eva love it, too."

The boy made no reply. He did love it; but his was the heart of youth, and it yearned for change and for adventure and for what lay beyond the circling hills and the broad, untroubled valley that spread its level fields below "the castle on the hill."

"The girls are dressing for a swim," said the older man, after a moment of silence. "Aren't you boys going in?"

"The girls" included his wife and Mrs. Evans, as well as Grace, for the colonel insisted that youth was purely a physical and mental attribute, independent of time. If one could feel and act in accord with the spirit of youth, one could not be old.

"Are you going in?" asked his son.

"Yes, I was waiting for you two."

"I think I'll be excused, sir," said Guy. "The water is too cold yet. I tried it yesterday, and nearly froze to death. I'll come and watch."

The two Penningtons moved off toward the house, to get into swimming things, while young Evans wandered down into the water gardens. As he stood there, idly content in the quiet beauty of the spot, Allen came down the steps, his check in his hand. At sight of the boy he halted behind him, an unpleasant expression upon his face.

Evans, suddenly aware that he was not alone, turned and recognized the man.

"Oh, hello, Allen!" he said.

"Young Pennington just canned me," said Allen, with no other return of Evans's greeting.

"I'm sorry," said Evans.

"You may be sorrier!" growled Allen, continuing on his way toward the cabin to get his blankets and clothes.

For a moment Guy stared after the man, a puzzled expression knitting his brows. Then he slowly flushed, glancing quickly about to see if any one had overheard the brief conversation between Slick Allen and himself.

A few minutes later he entered the inclosure west of the house, where the swimming pool lay. Mrs. Pennington and her guests were already in the pool, swimming vigorously to keep warm, and a moment later the colonel and Custer ran from the house and dived in simultaneously. Though there was twenty-six years' difference in their ages, it was not evidenced by any lesser vitality or agility on the part of the older man.

Colonel Custer Pennington had been born in Virginia fifty years before. Graduated from the Virginia Military Institute and West Point, he had taken a commission in the cavalry branch of the service. Campaigning in Cuba, he had been shot through one lung, and shortly after the close of the war he was retired for disability, with rank of lieutenant colonel. In 1900 he had come to California, on the advice of his physician, in the forlorn hope that he might prolong his sufferings a few years more.

For two hundred years the Penningtons had bred fine men, women, and horses upon the same soil in the State whose very existence was inextricably interwoven with their own. A Pennington leave Virginia? Horrors! Perish the thought! But Colonel Custer Pennington had had to leave it or die, and with a young wife and a two-year-old boy he couldn't afford to die. Deep in his heart he meant to recover his health in distant California and then return to the land of his love; but his physician had told a mutual friend, who was also Pennington's attorney, that "poor old Cus" would almost undoubtedly be dead inside of a year.

And so Pennington had come West with Mrs. Pennington and little Custer, Jr., and had found the Rancho del Ganado run down, untenanted, and for sale. A month of loafing had left him almost ready to die of stagnation, without any assistance from his poor lung; and when, in the course of a drive to another ranch, he had happened

to see the place, and had learned that it was for sale, the germ had been sown.

He judged from the soil and the water that Ganado was not well suited to raise the type of horse that he knew best, and that he and his father and his grandfathers before them had bred in Virginia; but he saw other possibilities. Moreover, he loved the hills and the cañons from the first; and so he had purchased the ranch, more to have something that would temporarily accupy his mind until his period of exile was ended by a return to his native State, or by death, than with any idea that it would prove a permanent home.

The old Spanish American house had been remodeled and rebuilt. In four years he had found that Herefords, Berkshires, and Percherons may win a place in a man's heart almost equal to that which a thoroughbred occupies. Then a little daughter had come, and the final seal that stamps a man's house as his home was placed upon " the castle on the hill."

His lung had healed—he could not tell by any sign it gave that it was not as good as ever—and still he stayed on in the land of sunshine, which he had grown to love without realizing its hold upon him. Gradually he had forgotten to say " when we go back home "; and when at last a letter came from a younger brother, saying that he wished to buy the old place in Virginia if the Custer Penningtons did not expect to return to it, the colonel was compelled to face the issue squarely.

They had held a little family council—the colonel and Julia, his wife, with seven-year-old Custer and little one-year-old Eva. Eva, sitting in her mother's lap, agreed with every one. Custer, Jr., burst into tears at the very suggestion of leaving dear old Ganado.

" And what do you think about it, Julia?" asked the colonel.

" I love Virginia, dear," she had replied; " but I think I love California even more, and I say it without disloyalty to my own State. It's a different kind of love."

" I know what you mean," said her husband. " Virginia is a mother to us, California a sweetheart."

And so they stayed upon the Rancho del Ganado.

IV

Work and play were inextricably entangled upon Ganado, the play being of a nature that fitted them better for their work, while the work, always in the open and usually from the saddle, they enjoyed fully as much as the play. While the tired business man of the city was expending a day's vitality and nervous energy in an effort to escape from the turmoil of the mad rush-hour and find a strap from which to dangle homeward amid the toxic effluvia of the melting pot, Colonel Pennington plunged and swam in the cold, invigorating waters of his pool, after a day of labor fully as constructive and profitable as theirs.

" One more dive!" he called, balancing upon the end of the springboard, " and then I'm going out. Eva ought to be here by the time we're dressed, hadn't she? I'm about famished."

" I haven't heard the train whistle yet, though it must be due," replied Mrs. Pennington. " You and Boy make so much noise swimming that we'll miss Gabriel's trump if we happen to be in the pool at the time!"

The colonel, Custer, and Grace Evans dived simultaneously, and, coming up together, raced for the shallow end, where Mrs. Evans and her hostess were preparing to leave the pool. The girl, reaching the hand rail first, arose laughing and triumphant.

" My foot slipped as I dived," cried the younger Pennington, wiping the water from his eyes, " or I'd have caught you!"

" No alibis, Boy!" laughed the colonel. " Grace beat you fair and square."

" Race you back for a dollar, Grace!" challenged the young man.

" You're on," she cried. " One, two, three—go!"

They were off. The colonel, who had preceded them leisurely into the deep water, swam close to his son as the latter was passing, a yard in the lead. Simultaneously the young man's progress ceased. With a Comanche-like yell he turned upon his father, and the two men grappled and went down. When they came up, spluttering and laughing, the girl was climbing out of the pool.

" You win, Grace!" shouted the colonel.

" It's a frame-up!" cried Custer. " He grabbed me by the ankle!"

" Well, who had a better right?" demanded the girl. " He's referee."

" He's a fine mess for a referee!" grumbled Custer good-naturedly.

" Run along and get your dollar, and

pay up like a gentleman," admonished his father.

"What do you get out of it? What do you pay him, Grace?"

They were still bantering as they entered the house and sought their several rooms to dress.

Guy Evans strolled from the walled garden of the swimming pool to the open arch that broke the long pergola beneath which the driveway ran along the north side of the house. Here he had an unobstructed view of the broad valley stretching away to the mountains in the distance.

Down the center of the valley a toy train moved noiselessly. As he watched it, he saw a puff of white rise from the tiny engine. It rose and melted in the evening air before the thin clear sound of the whistle reached his ears. The train crawled behind the green of trees and disappeared.

He knew that it had stopped at the station, and that a slender, girlish figure was alighting, with a smile for the porter and a gay word for the conductor who had carried her back and forth for years upon her occasional visits to the city a hundred miles away. Now the chauffeur was taking her bag and carrying it to the roadster that she would drive home along the wide, straight boulevard that crossed the valley—utterly ruining a number of perfectly good speed laws.

Two minutes elapsed, and the train crawled out from behind the trees and continued its way up the valley—a little black caterpillar with spots of yellow twinkling along its sides. As twilight deepened, the lights from ranch houses and villages sprinkled the floor of the valley. Like jewels scattered from a careless hand, they fell singly and in little clusters; and then the stars, serenely superior, came forth to assure the glory of a perfect California night.

The headlights of a motor car turned in at the driveway. Guy went to the east porch and looked in at the living room door, where some of the family had already collected.

"Eva's coming!" he announced.

She had been gone since the day before, but she might have been returning from a long trip abroad, if every one's eagerness to greet her was any criterion. Unlike city dwellers, these people had never learned to conceal the lovelier emotions of their hearts behind a mask of assumed indifference. Perhaps the fact that they were not forever crowded shoulder to shoulder with strangers permitted them an enjoyable naturalness which the dweller in the wholesale districts of humanity can never know; for what a man may reveal of his heart among friends he hides from the unsympathetic eyes of others, though it may be the noblest of his possessions.

With a rush the car topped the hill, swung up the driveway, and stopped at the corner of the house. A door flew open, and the girl leaped from the driver's seat.

"Hello, everybody!" she cried.

Snatching a kiss from her brother as she passed him, she fairly leaped upon her mother, hugging, kissing, laughing, dancing, and talking all at once. Espying her father, she relinquished a disheveled and laughing mother and dived for him.

"Most adorable pops!" she cried, as he caught her in his arms. "Are you glad to have your little nuisance back? I'll bet you're not. Do you love me? You won't when you know how much I've spent, but oh, popsy, I had *such* a good time! That's all there was to it, and oh, momsie, who, who, *who* do you suppose I met? Oh, you'd never guess—never, never!"

"Whom did you meet?" asked her mother.

"Yes, little one, *whom* did you meet?" inquired her brother.

"And he's perfectly *gorgeous,*" continued the girl, as if there had been no interruption; "and I danced with him—oh, such *divine* dancing! Oh, Guy Evans! Why, how do you do? I never saw you."

The young man nodded glumly.

"How are you, Eva?" he said.

"Mrs. Evans is here, too, dear," her mother reminded her.

The girl curtsied before her mother's guest, and then threw her arm about the older woman's neck.

"Oh, Aunt Mae!" she cried. "I'm *so* excited; but you should have *seen* him, and, momsie, I got the *cutest* riding hat!" They were moving toward the living room door, which Guy was holding open. "Guy, I got you the splendiferousest Christmas present!"

"Help!" cried her brother, collapsing into a porch chair. "Don't you know that I have a weak heart? Do your Christmas shopping early—do it in April! Oh, Lord, can you beat it?" he demanded of the others. "Can you beat it?"

"I think it was mighty nice of Eva to

remember me at all," said Guy, thawing perceptibly.

"What is it?" asked Custer. "I'll bet you got him a pipe."

"How ever in the world did you guess?" demanded Eva.

Custer rocked from side to side in his chair, laughing.

"What are you laughing at? Idiot!" cried the girl. "How did you guess I got him a pipe?"

"Because he never smokes anything but cigarettes."

"You're horrid!"

He pulled her down onto his lap and kissed her.

"Dear little one!" he cried. Taking her head between his hands, he shook it. "Hear 'em rattle!"

"But I love a pipe," stated Guy emphatically. "The trouble is, I never had a really nice one before."

"There!" exclaimed the girl triumphantly. "And you know *Sherlock Holmes* always smoked a pipe."

Her brother knitted his brows.

"I don't quite connect," he announced.

"Well, if you need a diagram, isn't Guy an author?" she demanded.

"Not so that any one could notice it—yet," demurred Evans.

"Well, you're going to be!" said the girl proudly.

"The light is commencing to dawn," announced her brother. "*Sherlock Holmes*, the famous author, who wrote Conan Doyle!"

A blank expression overspread the girl's face, to be presently expunged by a slow smile.

"You are perfectly horrid!" she cried. "I'm going in to dapper up a bit for dinner—don't wait."

She danced through the living room and out into the patio toward her own rooms.

"Rattle, rattle, little brain; rattle, rattle round again," her brother called after her. "Can you beat her?" he added, to the others.

"She can't even be approximated," laughed the colonel. "In all the world there is only one of her."

"And she's ours, bless her!" said the brother.

The colonel was glancing over the headlines of an afternoon paper that Eva had brought from the city.

"What's new?" asked Custer.

"Same old rot," replied his father. "Murders, divorces, kidnapers, bootleggers, and they haven't even the originality to make them interesting by evolving new methods. Oh, hold on—this isn't so bad! 'Two hundred thousand dollars' worth of stolen whisky landed on coast,' he read. 'Prohibition enforcement agents, together with special agents from the Treasury Department, are working on a unique theory that may reveal the whereabouts of the fortune in bonded whisky stolen from a government warehouse in New York a year ago. All that was known until recently was that the whisky was removed from the warehouse in trucks in broad daylight, compassing one of the boldest robberies ever committed in New York. Now, from a source which they refuse to divulge, the government sleuths have received information which leads them to believe that the liquid loot was loaded aboard a sailing vessel, and after a long trip around the Horn, is lying somewhere off the coast of southern California. That it is being lightered ashore in launches and transported to some hiding place in the mountains is one theory upon which the government is working. The whisky is eleven years old, was bottled in bond three years ago, just before the Eighteenth Amendment became a harrowing reality. It will go hard with the traffickers in this particular parcel of wet goods if they are apprehended, since the theft was directly from a government bonded warehouse, and all government officials concerned in the search are anxious to make an example of the guilty parties.'

"Eleven years old!" sighed the colonel. "It makes my mouth water! I've been subsisting on home-made grape wine for over a year. Think of it—a Pennington! Why, my ancestors must be writhing in their Virginia graves!"

"On the contrary, they're probably laughing in their sleeves. They died before July 1, 1919," interposed Custer. "Eleven years old—eight years in the wood," he mused aloud, shooting a quick glance in the direction of Guy Evans, who suddenly became deeply interested in a novel lying on a table beside his chair, notwithstanding the fact that he had read it six months before and hadn't liked it. "And it will go hard with the traffickers, too," continued young Pennington. "Well, I should hope it would. They'll probably hang 'em, the vile miscreants!"

Guy had risen and walked to the doorway opening upon the patio.

"I wonder what is keeping Eva," he remarked.

"Getting hungry?" asked Mrs. Pennington. "Well, I guess we all are. Suppose we don't wait any longer? Eva won't mind."

"If I wait much longer," observed the colonel, "some one will have to carry me into the dining room."

As they crossed the library toward the dining room the two young men walked behind their elders.

"Is your appetite still good?" inquired Custer.

"Shut up!" retorted Evans. "You give me a pain."

They had finished their soup before Eva joined them, and after the men were reseated they took up the conversation where it had been interrupted. As usual, if not always brilliant, it was at least diversified, for it included many subjects from grand opera to the budding of English walnuts on the native wild stock, and from the latest novel to the most practical method of earmarking pigs. Paintings, poems, plays, pictures, people, horses, and home-brew—each came in for a share of the discussion, argument, and raillery that ran round the table.

During a brief moment when she was not engaged in conversation, Guy seized the opportunity to whisper to Eva, who sat next to him.

"Who was that bird you met in L. A.?" he asked.

"Which one?"

"Which one! How many did you meet?"

"Oodles of them."

"I mean the one you were ranting about."

"Which one was I ranting about? I don't remember."

"You're enough to drive anybody to drink, Eva Pennington!" cried the young man disgustedly.

"Radiant man!" she cooed. "What's the dapper little idea in that talented brain—jealous?"

"I want to know who he is," demanded Guy.

"Who who is?"

"You know perfectly well who I mean—the poor fish you were raving about before dinner. You said you danced with him. Who is he? That's what I want to know."

"I don't like the way you talk to me; but if you must know, he was the most dazzling thing you ever saw. He—"

"I never saw him, and I don't want to, and I don't care how dazzling he is. I only want to know his name."

"Well, why didn't you say so in the first place? His name's Wilson Crumb." Her tone was as of one who says: "Behold Alexander the Great!"

"Wilson Crumb! Who's he?"

"Do you mean to sit there and tell me that you don't know who Wilson Crumb is, Guy Evans?" she demanded.

"Never heard of him," he insisted.

"Never heard of Wilson Crumb, the famous actor director? Such ignorance!"

"Did you ever hear of him before this trip to L. A.?" inquired her brother from across the table. "I never heard you mention him before."

"Well, maybe I didn't," admitted the girl; "but he's the most dazzling dancer you ever saw—and such eyes! And maybe he'll come out to the ranch and bring his company. He said they were often looking for just such locations."

"And I suppose you invited him?" demanded Custer accusingly.

"And why not? I had to be polite, didn't I?"

"You know perfectly well that father has never permitted such a thing," insisted her brother, looking toward the colonel for support.

"He didn't ask father—he asked me," returned the girl.

"You see," said the colonel, "how simply Eva solves every little problem."

"But you know, popsy, how perfectly superb it would be to have them take some pictures right here on our very own ranch, where we could watch them all day long."

"Yes," growled Custer; "watch them wreck the furniture and demolish the lawns! Why, one bird of a director ran a troop of cavalry over one of the finest lawns in Hollywood. Then they'll go up in the hills and chase the cattle over the top into the ocean. I've heard all about them. I'd never allow one of 'em on the place."

"Maybe they're not all inconsiderate and careless," suggested Mrs. Pennington.

"You remember there was a company took a few scenes at my place a year or so

ago," interjected Mrs. Evans. "They were very nice indeed."

"They were just wonderful," said Grace Evans. "I hope the colonel lets them come. It would be piles of fun!"

"You can't tell anything about them," volunteered Guy. "I understand they pick up all sorts of riffraff for extra people—I. W. W's and all sorts of people like that. I'd be afraid."

He shook his head dubiously.

"The trouble with you two is," asserted Eva, "that you're afraid to let us girls see any nice-looking actors from the city. That's what's the matter with you!"

"Yes, they're jealous," agreed Mrs. Pennington, laughing.

"Well," said Custer, "if there are leading men there are leading ladies, and from what I've seen of them the leading ladies are better-looking than the leading men. By all means, now that I consider the matter, let them come. Invite them at once, for a month—wire them!"

"Silly!" cried his sister. "He may not come here at all. He just mentioned it casually."

"And all this tempest in a teapot for nothing," said the colonel.

Wilson Crumb was forthwith dropped from the conversation and forgotten by all, even by impressionable little Eva.

As the young people gathered around Mrs. Pennington at the piano in the living room, Mrs. Evans and Colonel Pennington sat apart, carrying on a desultory conversation while they listened to the singing.

"We have a new neighbor," remarked Mrs. Evans, "on the ten-acre orchard adjoining us on the west."

"Yes—Mrs. Burke. She has moved in, has she?" inquired the colonel.

"Yesterday. She is a widow from the East — has a daughter in Los Angeles, I believe."

"She came to see me about a month ago," said the colonel, "to ask my advice about the purchase of the property. She seemed rather a refined, quiet little body. I must tell Julia—she will want to call on her."

"I insisted on her taking dinner with us last night," said Mrs. Evans. "She seems very frail, and was all worn out. Unpacking and settling is trying enough for a robust person, and she seems so delicate that I really don't see how she stood it at all."

Then the conversation drifted to other topics until the party at the piano broke up and Eva came dancing over to her father.

"Gorgeous popsy!" she cried, seizing him by an arm. "Just one dance before bedtime—if you love me, just one!"

Colonel Pennington rose from his chair, laughing.

"I know your one dance, you little fraud —five fox-trots, three one-steps, and a waltz."

With their arms about each other they started for the ballroom—really a big play room, which adjoined the garage. Behind them, laughing and talking, came the two older women, the two sons, and Grace Evans. They would dance for an hour and then go to bed, for they rose early and were in the saddle before sunrise, living their happy, care-free life far from the strife and squalor of the big cities, and yet with more of the comforts and luxuries than most city dwellers ever achieve.

V

THE bungalow at 1421 Vista del Paso was of the new school of Hollywood architecture, which appears to be a hysterical effort to combine Queen Anne, Italian, Swiss chalet, Moorish, Mission, and Martian. Its plaster walls were of a yellowish rose, the outside woodwork being done in light blue, while the windows were shaded with striped awnings of olive and pink. On one side of the entrance rose a green pergola—the ambitious atrocity that marks the meeting place of landscape gardening and architecture, and that outrages them both. Culture has found a virus for the cast iron dogs, deer, and rabbits that ramped in immobility upon the lawns of yesteryear, but the green pergola is an incurable disease.

Connecting with the front of the house, a plaster wall continued across the narrow lot to the property line at one side and from there back to the alley, partially inclosing a patio—which is Hollywood for back yard. An arched gateway opened into the patio from the front. The gate was of rough redwood boards, and near the top there were three auger holes arranged in the form of a triangle—this was art. Upon the yellow-rose plaster above the arch a design of three monkeys was stenciled in purple—this also was art.

As you wait in the three-foot-square vestibule you notice that the floor is paved

with red brick set in black mortar, and that the Oregon pine door, with its mahogany stain, would have been beautiful in its severe simplicity but for the little square of plate glass set in the upper right hand corner, demonstrating conclusively the daring originality of the artist architect.

Presently your ring is answered, and the door is opened by a Japanese schoolboy of thirty-five in a white coat. You are ushered directly into a living room, whereupon you forget all about architects and art, for the room is really beautiful, even though a trifle heavy in an Oriental way, with its Chinese rugs, dark hangings, and ponderous, overstuffed furniture. The Japanese schoolboy, who knows you, closes the door behind you and then tiptoes silently from the room.

Across from you, on a divan, a woman is lying, her face buried among pillows. When you cough, she raises her face toward you, and you see that it is very beautiful, even though the eyes are a bit wide and staring and the expression somewhat haggard. You see a mass of black hair surrounding a face of perfect contour. Even the plucked and penciled brows, the rouged cheeks, and the carmined lips cannot hide a certain dignity and sweetness.

At sight of you she rises, a bit unsteadily, and, smiling with her lips, extends a slender hand in greeting. The fingers of the hand tremble and are stained with nicotine. Her eyes do not smile—ever.

"The same as usual?" she asks in a weary voice.

Your throat is very dry. You swallow before you assure her eagerly, almost feverishly, that her surmise is correct. She leaves the room. Probably you have not noticed that she is wild-eyed and haggard, or that her fingers are stained and trembling, for you, too, are wild-eyed and haggard, and you are trembling worse than she.

Presently she returns. In her left hand is a small glass phial, containing many little tablets. As she crosses to you, she extends her right hand with the palm up. It is a slender, delicate hand, yet there is a look of strength to it, for all its whiteness. You lay a bill in it, and she hands you the phial. That is all. You leave, and she closes the Oregon pine door quietly behind you.

As she turns about toward the divan again, she hesitates. Her eyes wander to a closed door at one side of the room. She takes a half step toward it, and then draws back, her shoulders against the door. Her fingers are clenched tightly, the nails sinking into the soft flesh of her palms; but still her eyes are upon the closed door. They are staring and wild, like those of a beast at bay. She is trembling from head to foot.

For a minute she stands there, fighting her grim battle, alone and without help. Then, as with a last mighty effort, she drags her eyes from the closed door and glances toward the divan. With unsteady step she returns to it and throws herself face down among the pillows.

Her shoulders move to dry sobs, she clutches the pillows frantically in her strong fingers, she rolls from side to side, as people do who are suffering physical torture; but at last she relaxes and lies quiet.

A clock ticks monotonously from the mantel. Its sound fills the whole room, growing with fiendish intensity to a horrid din that pounds upon taut, raw nerves. She covers her ears with her palms to shut it out, but it bores insistently through. She clutches her thick hair with both hands; her fingers are entangled in it. For a long minute she lies thus, prone, and then her slippered feet commence to fly up and down as she kicks her toes in rapid succession into the unresisting divan.

Suddenly she leaps to her feet and rushes toward the mantel.

"Damn you!" she screams, and, seizing the clock, dashes it to pieces upon the tiled hearth.

Then her eyes leap to the closed door; and now, without any hesitation, almost defiantly, she crosses the room, opens the door, and disappears within the bathroom beyond.

Five minutes later the door opens again, and the woman comes back into the living room. She is humming a gay little tune. Stopping at a table, she takes a cigarette from a carved wooden box and lights it. Then she crosses to the baby grand piano in one corner, and commences to play. Her voice, rich and melodious, rises in a sweet old song of love and youth and happiness.

Something has mended her shattered nerves. Upon the hearth lies the shattered clock. It can never be mended.

If you should return now and look at her, you would see that she was even more beautiful than you had at first suspected.

She has put her hair in order once more, and has arranged her dress. You see now that her figure is as perfect as her face, and when she crossed to the piano you could not but note the easy grace of her carriage.

Her name—her professional name—is Gaza de Lure. You may have seen her in small parts on the screen, and may have wondered why some one did not star her. Of recent months you have seen her less and less often, and you have been sorry, for you had learned to admire the sweetness and purity that were reflected in her every expression and mannerism. You liked her, too, because she was as beautiful as she was good—for you knew that she was good just by looking at her in the pictures; but above all you liked her for her acting, for it was unusually natural and unaffected, and something told you that here was a born actress who would some day be famous.

Two years ago she came to Hollywood from a little town in the Middle West—that is, two years before you looked in upon her at the bungalow on the Vista del Paso. She was fired by high purpose then. Her child's heart, burning with lofty ambition, had set its desire upon a noble goal. The broken bodies of a thousand other children dotted the road to the same goal, but she did not see them, or, seeing, did not understand.

Stronger, perhaps, than her desire for fame was an unselfish ambition that centered about the mother whom she had left behind. To that mother the girl's success would mean greater comfort and happiness than she had known since a worthless husband had deserted her shortly after the baby came—the baby who was now known as Gaza de Lure.

There had been the usual rounds of the studios, the usual disappointments, followed by more or less regular work as an extra girl. During this period she had learned many things—of some of which she had never thought as having any possible bearing upon her chances for success.

For example, a director had asked her to go with him to Vernon one evening, for dinner and dancing, and she had refused, for several reasons—one being her certainty that her mother would disapprove, and another the fact that the director was a married man. The following day the girl who had accompanied him was cast for a part which had been promised to Gaza, and for which Gaza was peculiarly suited. As she was leaving the lot that day, greatly disappointed, the assistant director had stopped her.

"Too bad, kid," he said. "I'm mighty sorry, for I always liked you. If I can ever help you, I sure will."

The kindly words brought the tears to her eyes. Here, at least, was one good man; but he was not in much of a position to help her.

"You're very kind," she said; "but I'm afraid there's nothing you can do."

"Don't be too sure of that," he answered. "I've got enough on that big stiff so's he has to do about as I say. The trouble with you is you ain't enough of a good fellow. You got to be a good fellow to get on in pictures. Just step out with me some night, an' I promise you you'll get a job!"

The suddenly widening childish eyes meant nothing to the shallow mind of the callow little shrimp, whose brain pan would doubtless have burst under the pressure of a single noble thought. As she turned quickly and walked away, he laughed aloud. She had not gone back to that studio.

In the months that followed she had had many similar experiences, until she had become hardened enough to feel the sense of shame and insult less strongly than at first. She could talk back to them now, and tell them what she thought of them; but she found that she got fewer and fewer engagements. There was always enough to feed and clothe her, and to pay for the little room she rented; but there seemed to be no future, and that had been all that she cared about.

She would not have minded hard work—she had expected that. Nor did she fear disappointments and a slow, tedious road; for though she was but a young girl, she was not without character, and she had a good head on those trim shoulders of hers. She was unsophisticated, yet mature, too, for her years; for she had always helped her mother to plan the conservation of their meager resources.

Many times she had wanted to go back to her mother, but she had stayed on, because she still had hopes, and because she shrank from the fact of defeat admitted. How often she cried herself to sleep in those lonely nights, after days of bitter

disillusionment! The great ambition that had been her joy was now her sorrow. The vain little conceit that she had woven about her screen name was but a pathetic memory.

She had never told her mother that she had taken the name of Gaza de Lure, for she had dreamed of the time when it would leap into national prominence overnight in some wonderful picture, and her mother, unknowing, would see the film and recognize her. How often she had pictured the scene in their little theater at home—her sudden recognition by her mother and their friends—the surprise, the incredulity, and then the pride and happiness in her mother's face! How they would whisper! And after the show they would gather around her mother, all excitedly talking at the same time.

And then she had met Wilson Crumb. She had had a small part in a picture in which he played lead, and which he also directed. He had been very kind to her, very courteous. She had thought him handsome, notwithstanding a certain weakness in his face; but what had attracted her most was the uniform courtesy of his attitude toward all the women of the company. Here at last, she thought, she had found a real gentleman whom she could trust implicitly; and once again her ambition lifted its drooping head.

She thought of what another girl had once told her—an older girl, who had been in pictures for several years.

"They are not all bad, dear," her friend had said. "There are good and bad in the picture game, just as there are in any sort of business. It's been your rotten luck to run up against a lot of the bad ones."

The first picture finished, Crumb had cast her for a more important part in another, and she had made good in both. Before the second picture was completed, the company that employed Crumb offered her a five-year contract. It was only for fifty dollars a week; but it included a clause which automatically increased the salary to one hundred a week, two hundred and fifty, and then five hundred dollars in the event that they starred her. She knew that it was to Crumb that she owed the contract—Crumb had seen to that.

Very gradually, then—so gradually and insidiously that the girl could never recall just when it had started — Crumb commenced to make love to her. At first it took only the form of minor attentions—little courtesies and thoughtful acts; but after a while he spoke of love—very gently and very tenderly, as any man might have done.

She had never thought of loving him or any other man; so she was puzzled at first, but she was not offended. He had given her no cause for offense. When he had first broached the subject, she had asked him not to speak of it, as she did not think that she loved him, and he had said that he would wait; but the seed was planted in her mind, and it came to occupy much of her thoughts.

She realized that she owed to him what little success she had achieved. She had an assured income that was sufficient for her simple wants, while permitting her to send something home to her mother every week, and it was all due to the kindness of Wilson Crumb. He was a successful director, he was more than a fair actor, he was good-looking, he was kind, he was a gentleman, and he loved her. What more could any girl ask?

She thought the matter out very carefully, finally deciding that though she did not exactly love Wilson Crumb she probably would learn to love him, and that if he loved her it was in a way her duty to make him happy, when he had done so much for her happiness. She made up her mind, therefore, to marry him whenever he asked her; but Crumb did not ask her to marry him. He continued to make love to her; but the matter of marriage never seemed to enter the conversation.

Once, when they were out on location, and had had a hard day, ending by getting thoroughly soaked in a sudden rain, he had followed her to her room in the little mountain inn where they were stopping.

"You're cold and wet and tired," he said. "I want to give you something that will brace you up."

He entered the room and closed the door behind him. Then he took from his pocket a small piece of paper folded into a package about an inch and three-quarters long by half an inch wide, with one end tucked ingeniously inside the fold to form a fastening. Opening it, he revealed a white powder, the minute crystals of which glistened beneath the light from the electric bulbs.

"It looks just like snow," she said.

"Sure!" he replied, with a faint smile.

"It is snow. Look, I'll show you how to take it."

He divided the powder into halves, took one in the palm of his hand, and snuffed it into his nostrils.

"There!" he exclaimed. "That's the way—it will make you feel like a new woman."

"But what is it?" she asked. "Won't it hurt me?"

"It 'll make you feel bully. Try it."

So she tried it, and it made her "feel bully." She was no longer tired, but deliciously exhilarated.

"Whenever you want any, let me know," he said, as he was leaving the room. "I usually have some handy."

"But I'd like to know what it is," she insisted.

"Aspirin," he replied. "It makes you feel that way when you snuff it up your nose."

After she left, she recovered the little piece of paper from the waste basket where he had thrown it, her curiosity aroused. She found it a rather soiled bit of writing paper with a "C" written in lead pencil upon it.

"'C,'" she mused. "Why aspirin with a C?"

She thought she would question Wilson about it.

The next day she felt out of sorts and tired, and at noon she asked him if he had any aspirin with him. He had, and again she felt fine and full of life. That evening she wanted some more, and Crumb gave it to her. The next day she wanted it oftener, and by the time they returned to Hollywood from location she was taking it five or six times a day. It was then that Crumb asked her to come and live with him at his Vista del Paso bungalow; but he did not mention marriage.

He was standing with a little paper of the white powder in his hand, separating half of it for her, and she was waiting impatiently for it.

"Well?" he asked.

"Well, what?"

"Are you coming over to live with me?" he demanded.

"Without being married?" she asked.

She was surprised that the idea no longer seemed horrible. Her eyes and her mind were on the little white powder that the man held in his hand.

Crumb laughed.

"Quit your kidding," he said. "You know perfectly well that I can't marry you yet. I have a wife in San Francisco."

She did not know it perfectly well—she did not know it at all; yet it did not seem to matter so very much. A month ago she would have caressed a rattlesnake as willingly as she would have permitted a married man to make love to her; but now she could listen to a plea from one who wished her to come and live with him, without experiencing any numbing sense of outraged decency.

Of course, she had no intention of doing what he asked; but really the matter was of negligible import—the thing in which she was most concerned was the little white powder. She held out her hand for it, but he drew it away.

"Answer me first," he said. "Are you going to be sensible or not?"

"You mean that you won't give it to me if I won't come?" she asked.

"That's precisely what I mean," he replied. "What do you think I am, anyway? Do you know what this bindle of 'C' stands me? Two fifty, and you've been snuffing about three of 'em a day. What kind of a sucker do you think I am?"

Her eyes, still upon the white powder, narrowed.

"I'll come," she whispered. "Give it to me!"

She went to the bungalow with him that day, and she learned where he kept the little white powders, hidden in the bathroom. After dinner she put on her hat and her fur, and took up her vanity case, while Crumb was busy in another room. Then, opening the front door, she called:

"Good-by!"

Crumb rushed into the living room.

"Where are you going?" he demanded.

"Home," she replied.

"No, you're not!" he cried. "You promised to stay here."

"I promised to come," she corrected him. "I never promised to stay, and I never shall until you are divorced and we are married."

"You'll come back," he sneered, "when you want another shot of snow!"

"Oh, I don't know," she replied. "I guess I can buy aspirin at any drug store as well as you."

Crumb laughed aloud.

"You little fool, you!" he cried derisive-

ly. "Aspirin! Why, it's cocaine you're snuffing, and you're snuffing about three grains of it a day!"

For an instant a look of horror filled her widened eyes.

"You beast!" she cried. "You unspeakable beast!"

Slamming the door behind her, she almost ran down the narrow walk and disappeared in the shadows of the palm trees that bordered the ill-lighted street.

The man did not follow her. He only stood there laughing, for he knew that she would come back. Craftily he had enmeshed her. It had taken months, and never had quarry been more wary or difficult to trap. A single false step earlier in the game would have frightened her away forever; but he had made no false step. He was very proud of himself, was Wilson Crumb, for he was convinced that he had done a very clever bit of work.

Rubbing his hands together, he walked toward the bathroom—he would take a shot of snow; but when he opened the receptacle, he found it empty.

"The little devil!" he ejaculated.

Frantically he rummaged through the medicine cabinet, but in vain. Then he hastened into the living room, seized his hat, and bolted for the street.

Almost immediately he realized the futility of search. He did not know where the girl lived. She had never told him. He did not know it, but she had never told any one. The studio had a post-office box number to which it could address communications to Gaza de Lure; the mother addressed the girl by her own name at the house where she had roomed since coming to Hollywood. The woman who rented her the room did not know her screen name. All she knew about her was that she seemed a quiet, refined girl who paid her room rent promptly in advance every week, and who was always home at night, except when on location.

Crumb returned to the bungalow, searched the bathroom twice more, and went to bed. For hours he lay awake, tossing restlessly.

"The little devil!" he muttered, over and over. "Fifty dollars' worth of cocaine—the little devil!"

The next day Gaza was at the studio, ready for work, when Crumb put in his belated appearance. He was nervous and irritable. Almost immediately he called her aside and demanded an accounting; but when they were face to face, and she told him that she was through with him, he realized that her hold upon him was stronger than he had supposed. He could not give her up. He was ready to promise anything, and he would demand nothing in return, only that she would be with him as much as possible. Her nights should be her own—she could go home then. And so the arrangement was consummated, and Gaza de Lure spent the days when she was not working at the bungalow on the Vista del Paso.

Crumb saw that she was cast for small parts that required but little of her time at the studio, yet raised no question at the office as to her salary of fifty dollars a week. Twice the girl asked why he did not star her, and both times he told her that he would—for a price; but the price was one that she would not pay. After a time the drugs which she now used habitually deadened her ambition, so that she no longer cared. She still managed to send a little money home, but not so much as formerly.

As the months passed, Crumb's relations with the source of the supply of their narcotic became so familiar that he could obtain considerable quantities at a reduced rate, and the plan of peddling the drug occurred to him. Gaza was induced to do her share, and so it came about that the better class "hypes" of Hollywood found it both safe and easy to obtain their supplies from the bungalow on the Vista del Paso. Cocaine, heroin, and morphine passed continually through the girl's hands, and she came to know many of the addicts, though she seldom had further intercourse with them than was necessary to the transaction of the business that brought them to the bungalow.

From one, a woman, she learned how to use morphine, dissolving the white powder in the bowl of a spoon by passing a lighted match beneath, and then drawing the liquid through a tiny piece of cotton into a hypodermic syringe and injecting it beneath the skin. Once she had experienced the sensation of well-being it induced, she fell an easy victim to this more potent drug.

One evening Crumb brought home with him a stranger whom he had known in San Francisco—a man whom he introduced as Allen. From that evening the fortunes of Gaza de Lure improved. Allen had just

returned from the Orient as a member of the crew of a freighter, and he had succeeded in smuggling in a considerable quantity of opium. In his efforts to dispose of it he had made the acquaintance of others in the same line of business, and had joined forces with them. His partners could command a more or less steady supply of morphine and cocaine from Mexico, while Allen undertook to keep up their stock of opium, and to arrange a market for their drugs in Los Angeles.

If Crumb could handle it all, Allen agreed to furnish morphine at fifty dollars an ounce—Gaza to do the actual peddling. The girl agreed on one condition—that half the profits should be hers. After that she had been able to send home more money than ever before, and at the same time to have all the morphine she wanted at a low price. She began to put money in the bank, made a first payment on a small orchard about a hundred miles from Los Angeles, and sent for her mother.

The day before you called on her in the "art" bungalow at 1421 Vista del Paso she had put her mother on a train bound for her new home, with the promise that the daughter would visit her "as soon as we finish this picture." It had required all the girl's remaining will power to hide her shame from those eager mother eyes; but she had managed to do it, though it had left her almost a wreck by the time the train pulled out of the station.

To Crumb she had said nothing about her mother. This was a part of her life that was too sacred to be revealed to the man whom she now loathed even as she loathed the filthy habit he had tricked her into; but she could no more give up the one than the other.

There had been a time when she had fought against the domination of these twin curses that had been visited upon her, but that time was over. She knew now that she would never give up morphine—that she could not if she wanted to, and that she did not want to. The little bindles of cocaine, morphine, and heroin that she wrapped so deftly with those slender fingers and marked "C," "M," or "H," according to their contents, were parts of her life now. The sallow, trembling creatures who came for them, or to whom she sometimes delivered them, and who paid her two dollars and a half a bindle, were also parts of her life. Crumb, too, was a part of her life. She hated the bindles, she hated the sallow, trembling people, she hated Crumb; but still she clung to them, for how else was she to get the drug without which she could not live?

VI

It was May. The rainy season was definitely over. A few April showers had concluded it. The Ganado hills showed their most brilliant greens. The March pigs were almost ready to wean. White-faced calves and black colts and gray colts surveyed this beautiful world through soft, dark eyes, and were filled with the joy of living as they ran beside their gentle mothers. A stallion neighed from the stable corral, and from the ridge behind Jackknife Cañon the Emperor of Ganado answered him.

A girl and a man sat in the soft grass beneath the shade of a live oak upon the edge of a low bluff in the pasture where the brood mares grazed with their colts. Their horses were tied to another tree near by. The girl held a bunch of yellow violets in her hand, and gazed dreamily down the broad cañon toward the valley. The man sat a little behind her and gazed at the girl. For a long time neither spoke.

"You cannot be persuaded to give it up, Grace?" he asked at last.

She shook her head.

"I should never be happy until I had tried it," she replied.

"Of course," he said, "I know how you feel about it. I feel the same way. I want to get away—away from the deadly stagnation and sameness of this life; but I am going to try to stick it out for father's sake, and I wish that you loved me enough to stick it out for mine. I believe that together we could get enough happiness out of life here to make up for what we are denied of real living, such as only a big city can offer. Then, when father is gone, we could go and live in the city—in any city that we wanted to live in—Los Angeles, Chicago, New York, London, Paris—anywhere."

"It isn't that I don't love you enough, Custer," said the girl. "I love you too much to want you to marry just a little farmer girl. When I come to you, I want you to be proud of me. Don't talk about the time when your father will have gone. It seems wicked. He would not want you to stay if he knew how you felt about it."

" You do not know," he replied. " Ever since I was a little boy he has counted on this—on my staying on and working with him. He wants us all to be together always. When Eva marries, he will build her a home on Ganado. You have already helped with the plans for ours. You know it is his dream, but you cannot know how much it means to him. It would not kill him if his dream was spoiled, but it would take so much happiness out of his life that I cannot bring myself to do it. It is not a matter of money, but of sentiment and love. If Ganado were wiped off the face of the earth to-morrow, we would still have all the money that we need; but he would never be happy again, for his whole life is bound up in the ranch and the dream that he has built around it. It is peculiar, too, that such a man as he should be so ruled by sentiment. You know how practical he is, and sometimes hard—yet I have seen the tears come to his eyes when he spoke of his love for Ganado."

" I know," she said, and they were silent again for a time. " You are a good son, Custer," she said presently. " I wouldn't have you any different. I am not so good a daughter. Mother does not want me to go. It is going to make her very unhappy, and yet I am going. The man who loves me does not want me to go. It is going to make him very unhappy, and yet I am going. It seems very selfish; but oh, Custer, I cannot help but feel that I am right! It seems to me that I have a duty to perform, and that this is the only way I can perform it. Perhaps I am only silly, but sometimes I feel that I am called by a higher power to give myself for a little time to the world, that the world may be happier and, I hope, a little better. You know I have always felt that the stage was one of the greatest powers for good in all the world, and now I believe that some day the screen will be an even greater power for good. It is with the conviction that I may help toward this end that I am so eager to go. You will be very glad and very happy, when I come back, that I did not listen to your arguments."

" I hope you are right, Grace," Custer Pennington said.

On a rustic seat beneath the new leaves of an umbrella tree a girl and a boy sat beside the upper lily pond on the south side of the hill below the ranch house. The girl held a spray of Japanese quince blossoms in her hand, and gazed dreamily at the water splashing lazily over the rocks into the pond. The boy sat beside her and gazed at the girl. For a long time neither spoke.

" Won't you please say yes?" whispered the boy presently.

" How perfectly, terribly silly you are!" she replied.

" I am not silly," he said. " I am twenty, and you are almost eighteen. It's time that we were marrying and settling down."

" On what?" she demanded.

" Well, we won't need much at first. We can live at home with mother," he explained, " until I sell a few stories."

" How perfectly gorgeristic!" she cried.

" Don't make fun of me! You wouldn't if you loved me," he pouted.

" I *do* love you, silly! But whatever in the world put the dapper little idea into your head that I wanted to be supported by my mother-in-law?"

" Mother-in-law!" protested the boy. " You ought to be ashamed to speak disrespectfully of my mother."

" You quaint child!" exclaimed the girl, laughing gayly. " Just as if I would speak disrespectfully of Aunt Mae, when I love her so splendiferously! Isn't she going to be my mother-in-law?"

The boy's gloom vanished magically.

" There!" he cried. " We're engaged! You've said it yourself. You've proposed, and I accept you. Yes, sure—she's going to be your mother-in-law!"

Eva flushed.

" I never said anything of the kind. How perfectly idiotical!"

" But you did say it. You proposed to me. I'm going to announce the engagement — ' Mrs. Mae Evans announces the engagement of her son, Guy Thackeray, to Miss Eva Pennington.' "

" Funeral notice later," snapped the girl, glaring at him.

" Aw, come, now, you needn't get mad at me. I was only fooling; but wouldn't it be great, Ev? We could always be together then, and I could write and you could—could—"

" Wash dishes," she suggested.

The light died from his eyes, and he dropped them sadly to the ground.

" I'm sorry I'm poor," he said. " I didn't think you cared about that, though."

She laid a brown hand gently over his.

"You know I don't care," she said. "I am a catty old thing. I'd just love it if we had a little place all our very own—just a teeny, weeny bungalow. I'd help you with your work, and keep hens, and have a little garden with onions and radishes and everything, and we wouldn't have to buy anything from the grocery store, and a bank account, and one sow; and when we drove into the city people would say 'There goes Guy Thackeray Evans, the famous author, but I wonder where his wife got that hat!'"

"Oh, Ev!" he cried, laughing. "You never can be serious more than two seconds, can you?"

"Why should I be?" she inquired. "And anyway, I was. It really would be elegantiferous if we had a little place of our own; but my husband has got to be able to support me, Guy. He'd lose his self-respect if he didn't; and then, if he lost his, how could I respect him? You've got to have respect on both sides, or you can't have love and happiness."

His face grew stern with determination.

"I'll get the money," he said; but he did not look at her. "But now that Grace is going away, mother will be all alone if I leave, too. Couldn't we live with her for a while?"

"Papa and mamma have always said that it was the worst thing a young married couple could do," she replied. "We could live near her, and see her every day; but I don't think we should all live together. Really, though, do you think Grace is going? It seems just too awful."

"I am afraid she is," he replied sadly. "Mother is all broken up about it; but she tries not to let Grace know."

"I can't understand it," said the girl. "It seems to me a selfish thing to do, and yet Grace has always been so sweet and generous. No matter how much I wanted to go, I don't believe I could bring myself to do it, knowing how terribly it would hurt papa. Just think, Guy—it is the first break, except for the short time we were away at school, since we have been born. We have all lived here always, it seems, your family and mine, like one big family; but after Grace goes it will be the beginning of the end. It will never be the same again."

There was a note of seriousness and sadness in her voice that sounded not at all like Eva Pennington. The boy shook his head.

"It is too bad," he said; "but Grace is so sure she is right—so positive that she has a great future before her, and that we shall all be so proud of her—that sometimes I am almost convinced myself."

"I hope she is right," said the girl, and then, with a return to her joyous self: "Oh, wouldn't it be spiffy if she really does become famous! I can see just how puffed up we shall all be when we read the reviews of her pictures, like this—'Miss Grace Evans, the famous star, has quite outdone her past successes in her latest picture, in which she is ably supported by such well known actors as Thomas Meighan, Wallace Reid, Gloria Swanson, and Mary Pickford.'"

"Why slight Douglas Fairbanks and Charlie Chaplin?" suggested Guy.

The girl rose.

"Come on!" she said. "Let's have a look at the pools—it isn't a perfect day unless I've seen fish in every pool. Do you remember how we used to watch and watch and watch for the fish in the lower pools, and run as fast as we could to be the first up to the house to tell if we saw them, and how many?"

"And do you remember the little turtles, and how wild they got?" he put in. "Sometimes we wouldn't see them for weeks, and then we'd get just a glimpse, so that we knew they were still there. Then, after a while, we never saw them again, and how we used to wonder and speculate as to what had become of them!"

"And do you remember the big water snake we found in the upper pool, and how Cus used to lie in wait for him with his little twenty-two?"

"Cus was always the hunter. How we used to trudge after him up and down those steep hills there in the cow pasture, while he hunted ground squirrels, and how mad he'd get if we made any noise! Gee, Ev, those were the good old days!"

"And how we used to fight, and what a nuisance Cus thought me; but he always asked me to go along, just the same. He's a wonderful brother, Guy!"

"He's a wonderful man, Ev," replied the boy. "You don't half know how wonderful he is. He's always thinking of some one else. Right now I'll bet he's eating his heart out because Grace is going away; and he can't go, just because he's thinking

more of some one's else happiness than his own."

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"He wants to go to the city. He wants to get into some business there; but he won't go, because he knows your father wants him here."

"Do you really think that?"

"I know it," he said.

They walked on in silence along the winding pathways among the flower-bordered pools, to stop at last beside the lower one. This had originally been a shallow wading pool for the children when they were small, but it was now given over to water hyacinth and brilliant fantails.

"There!" said the girl, presently. "I have seen fish in each pool."

"And you can go to bed with a clear conscience to-night," he laughed.

To the west of the lower pool there were no trees to obstruct their view of the hills that rolled down from the mountains to form the western wall of the cañon in which the ranch buildings and cultivated fields lay. As the two stood there, hand in hand, the boy's eyes wandered lovingly over the soft, undulating lines of these lower hills, with their parklike beauty of greensward dotted with wild walnut trees. As he looked he saw, for a brief moment, the figure of a man on horseback passing over the hollow of a saddle before disappearing upon the southern side.

Small though the distant figure was, and visible but for a moment, the boy recognized the military carriage of the rider. He glanced quickly at the girl to note if she had seen, but it was evident that she had not.

"Well, Ev," he said, "I guess I'll be toddling."

"So early?" she demanded.

"You see I've got to get busy, if I'm going to get the price of that teeny, weeny bungalow," he explained. "Now that we're engaged, you might kiss me good-by —eh?"

"We're not engaged, and I'll not kiss you good-by or good anything else. I don't believe in people kissing until they're married."

"Then why are you always raving about the wonderful kisses Antonio Moreno, or Milton Sills, or some other poor prune, gives the heroine at the end of the last reel?" he demanded.

"Oh, that's different," she explained. "Anyway, they're just going to get married. When we are just going to get married I'll let you kiss me—once a week, *maybe*."

"Thanks!" he cried.

A moment later he swung into the saddle, and with a wave of his hand cantered off up the cañon.

"Now what," said the girl to herself, "is he going up there for? He can't make any money back there in the hills. He ought to be headed straight for home and his typewriter!"

VII

Across the rustic bridge, and once behind the sycamores at the lower end of the cow pasture, Guy Evans let his horse out into a rapid gallop. A few minutes later he overtook a horseman who was moving at a slow walk farther up the cañon. At the sound of the pounding hoofbeats behind him, the latter turned in his saddle, reined about, and stopped. The boy rode up and drew in his blowing mount beside the other.

"Hello, Allen!" he said.

The man nodded.

"What's eatin' you?" he inquired.

"I've been thinking over that proposition of yours," explained Evans.

"Yes?"

"Yes, I've been thinking maybe I might swing it; but are you sure it's safe? How do I know you won't double-cross me?"

"You don't know," replied the other. "All you know is that I got enough on you now to send you to San Quentin. You wouldn't get nothin' worse if you handled the rest of it, an' you stand to clean up between twelve and fifteen thousand bucks on the deal. You needn't worry about me double-crossin' you. What good would it do me? I ain't got nothin' against you, kid. If you don't double-cross me I won't double-cross you; but look out for that cracker-fed dude your sister's goin' to hitch to. If he ever butts in on this I'll croak him an' send you to San Quentin, if I swing for it. Do you get me?"

Evans nodded.

"I'll go in on it," he said, "because I need the money; but don't you bother Custer Pennington—get that straight. I'd go to San Quentin and I'd swing myself before I'd stand for that. Another thing, and then we'll drop that line of chatter—you couldn't send me to San Quentin or anywhere else. I bought a few bottles of

hootch from you, and there isn't any judge or jury going to send me to San Quentin for that."

"You don't know what you done," said Allen, with a grin. "They's a thousand cases of bonded whisky hid back there in the hills, an' you engineered the whole deal at this end. Maybe you didn't have nothin' to do with stealin' it from a government bonded warehouse in New York; but you must 'a' knowed all about it, an' it was you that hired me and the other three to smuggle it off the ship and into the hills."

Evans was staring at the man in wide-eyed incredulity.

"How do you get that way?" he asked derisively.

"They's four of us to swear to it," said Allen; "an' how many you got to swear you didn't do it?"

"Why, it's a rotten frame-up!" exclaimed Evans.

"Sure it's a frame-up," agreed Allen; "but we won't use it if you behave yourself properly."

Evans looked at the man for a long minute — dislike and contempt unconcealed upon his face.

"I guess," he said presently, "that I don't need any twelve thousand dollars that bad, Allen. We'll call this thing off, as far as I am concerned. I'm through, right now. Good-by!"

He wheeled his horse to ride away.

"Hold on there, young feller!" said Allen. "Not so quick! You may think you're through, but you're not. We need you, and, anyway, you know too damned much for your health. You're goin' through with this. We got some other junk up there that there's more profit in than what there is in booze, and it's easier to handle. We know where to get rid of it; but the booze we can't handle as easy as you can, and so you're goin' to handle it."

"Who says I am?"

"*I* do," returned Allen, with an ugly snarl. "You'll handle it, or I'll do just what I said I'd do, and I'll do it *pronto*. How'd you like your mother and that Pennington girl to hear all I'd have to say?"

The boy sat with scowling, thoughtful brows for a long minute. From beneath a live oak, on the summit of a low bluff, a man discovered them. He had been sitting there talking with a girl. Suddenly he looked up.

"Why, there's Guy," he said. "Who's that with—why, it's that fellow Allen! What's he doing up here?" He rose to his feet. "You stay here a minute, Grace. I'm going down to see what that fellow wants on Ganado."

He untied the Apache and mounted, while below, just beyond the pasture fence, the boy turned sullenly toward Allen.

"I'll go through with it this once," he said. "You'll bring it down on burros at night?"

The other nodded affirmatively.

"Where do you want it?" he asked.

"Bring it to the west side of the old hay barn—the one that stands on our west line. When will you come?"

"To-day's Tuesday. We'll bring the first lot Friday night, about twelve o'clock; and after that every Friday the same time. You be ready to settle every Friday for what you've sold during the week—*sabe?*"

"Yes," replied Evans. "That's all, then;" and he turned and rode back toward the rancho.

Allen was continuing on his way toward the hills when his attention was again attracted by the sound of hoofbeats. Looking to his left, he saw a horseman approaching from inside the pasture. He recognized both horse and rider at once, but kept sullenly on his way.

Pennington rode up to the opposite side of the fence along which ran the trail that Allen followed.

"What are you doing here, Allen?" he asked in a not unkindly tone.

"Mindin' my own business, like you better," retorted the ex-stableman.

"You have no business back here on Ganado," said Pennington. "You'll have to get off the property."

"The hell I will!" exclaimed Allen.

At the same time he made a quick movement with his right hand; but Pennington made a quicker.

"That kind of stuff don't go here, Allen," said the younger man, covering the other with a forty-five. "Now turn around and get off the place, and don't come on it again. I don't want any trouble with you."

Without a word, Allen reined his horse about and rode down the cañon; but there was murder in his heart. Pennington watched him until he was out of revolver range, and then turned and rode back to Grace Evans.

(To be continued in the July number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE)